Cloud Business Software Helps Apex, N.C., Adapt to Fast Growth

How a town in Research Triangle Park transformed its ERP system

Apex, North Carolina, needs business technologies that can keep pace with its booming population growth. The town's recent migration to a cloud-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform shows how small-to-medium-sized communities can take advantage of sophisticated, powerful business software that may have seemed out of reach in years past.

The Challenge: Acquiring a Growth-Friendly ERP Technology

A suburban town southwest of the state capital in Raleigh, Apex has experienced significant growth in recent decades. Named Apex because it's on the high point of a local railway line, the hamlet boasted barely more than 300 people at the turn of the 20th century. The town's population grew to 5,000 by 1990, and then surged more than ten-fold over the next 40 years as Research Triangle Park and business-friendly government policies attracted high-tech companies and a professional workforce.[1]

Today, Apex has more than 77,000 residents and expects tens of thousands of new arrivals throughout the 2020s.[2] Many of them are college-educated[3] and they expect modern, easy-to-use government services delivered on their preferred computing devices.

To support this rapid growth, Apex needs a government IT infrastructure that's fast, scalable and flexible. The city may still radiate small-town charm, says Apex Director of Information Technology Erika Sacco, but "we can no longer operate as a small town."[4]

In 2007, the town started migrating away from its legacy green-screen system. It was a welcome change, but it still left much to be desired after a few years. Employees started moving data into spreadsheets or

ignoring some functions altogether. This prevented a holistic view of the business environment.

"We were boxed into a system that had a lot of modules that met our needs at the time," Sacco says. "But we needed a vendor that could implement all the wild wishes our team members came up with."

Apex envisioned a user-centered solution that focused on improving public service. The old system created silos because it prioritized the needs of departments over the needs of the public and individual users.

The town also wanted its software to increase transparency and break down obstacles to communication and collaboration for staff and the public.

The Solution: A Cloud-Based, User-Centered ERP System

Sacco's team launched data governance and business process improvement committees to develop plans to migrate to a new ERP platform. Implementation started in 2023 with more phases to come in the next few years. They started by engaging with Panorama Consultants, which specializes in helping clients choose ERP systems.

That partnership helped Apex develop a sophisticated RFP process that asked potential vendors to plainly state how well their technology and services could address the town's challenges. The "technical fit assessment" asked 27 questions across categories like networking, software architecture, security and training. Vendors had to provide scripts explaining how they would deliver their technologies.

"We walked through each and every script with the vendors," Sacco says. That information helped her

team score vendors on their ability to deliver on their promises to meet current needs while leaving room for expansion in years to come.

The winning bidder would have a lot on their plate. Besides the ERP migration, the new technology would have to dovetail with an automated metering infrastructure and a 311 system.

RPI Consultants, a seasoned ERP implementation and optimization firm, came out on top. "They never looked at us like we were crazy when we started talking about what we may want in the future," Sacco says. "It was always, 'Yeah, I think we can accomplish that this way.' We felt like that was a good fit."

RPI recommended Infor CloudSuite Public Sector Essentials for Growing Communities and budgeting from Euna Solutions. The technology infrastructure embraces four resource disciplines:
- ▶ Finances (global ledger and reporting; budgeting; employee expenses)
- ▶ People (human resources and payroll; time and attendance; talent management)
- ▶ Citizens (utility billing; asset management; customer portal for permitting and licensing)
- ▶ Supplies (inventory; requisitions and purchasing; and strategic sourcing and contracts)

"Euna Solutions delivers purpose-built tools to help address critical financial and administrative challenges in local government. Dramatic population growth means communities must change the way they are doing business," says Euna Solutions CEO Tom Amburgey. "Growth is a common opportunity and challenge for local governments and we're always thrilled to work with partners like RPI and Infor to connect the dots between general purpose ERPs and the particular needs of local government like Apex."

"Infor understands growing communities like the town of Apex are underserved in this market," says Susan Wiemeyer, senior vice president of sales for service industries at Infor. "Infor provides a full multi-tenant ERP package with a prescriptive approach so cities and counties can embark on their cloud journey with

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> *— Erika Sacco, Director of Information Technology, Apex, North Carolina*

core capabilities while also providing the foundation for future growth and expansion built in."

The opening phase of Apex's implementation updates finance, supply chain, human resources, workforce management and document management.

"We didn't have to do everything all at once," Sacco says. "We're slowly laying this out and adding improvements as we go, which has been extremely beneficial for the staff."

The Results: Serving a Growing Population

The new technology has Apex poised to grow with its population. "The CloudSuite platform is designed to tightly integrate with all the town systems and processes to become a hub of enterprise data," says Richard Leigh Stout, a partner with RPI Consultants.

Cloud-based software removes the limits of on-premises hardware. Infor's partnership with Amazon Web Services (AWS) ensures the town has all the computing resources it needs — both today and the years to come. "We don't have to worry about storage or capacity onsite," Sacco says.

With applications focusing on users and simplifying their experiences, Apex is helping its staff rethink outdated processes and gain insight on data that had been difficult or impossible to share.

"We can keep going with the integrations and the automations of things that might've been kept in someone's head or in spreadsheets," Sacco says. "We really want to get that into the system, so we have a better, holistic view of everything that's happening."

[1] https://www.apexnc.org/225/Our-History

[2] https://www.apexnc.org/DocumentCenter/View/405/Apex-Development-Report-PDF

[3] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/apextownnorthcarolina/PST045222

[4] https://event.on24.com/wcc/r/4334813/6263B1E0E3FBBFB4FC812892E60F5A46

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